**~~Miss Smalls~~ Cotton**

**In**

**Cotton’s Bad Day**

**By Helen Arlet**

 I tried not to twist my lips into a nervous frown as I looked over at the cameraman in the passenger seat beside me. I hadn’t exactly been thrilled when the chief asked me to let a camera crew ride along with me for one of those reality TV shows, but he had been pretty insistent about it. With the heat the force was taking lately, he said we needed some good publicity. It may not have been the exact *kind* of publicity he would have wanted, but he was insistent that under the circumstances, *any* good publicity was worth it.

 Yeah, I got it… The police force was under a lot of heat right now for its unfair treatment of prey species. We lived in a carnivore dominated world and the laws just weren’t set up to help us. Laws existed to protect carnivores while they preyed on us. It’s always been that way. And recently people were starting to get pretty sick of that and were actually speaking out against it. Especially against the police force itself… And the police force didn’t respond to that in *any* kind of way that made me proud to be a cop. So yeah… I could see why the chief was so insistent about wanting good publicity for a change.

 And with the situation Clawdette was currently in with the upcoming custody battle against her mom for Cindy, I kind of needed to stay on *really* good terms with the chief and the department as a whole. After all, who *knew* what kind of favors I was going to have to call in to make sure Clawdette and I were able to keep Cindy. Bernadette had a pretty strong case against us if she could manage to back any of it up. If it weren’t for the fact that Clawdette was *also* a carnivore I’d pretty much be counting this as a loss already. We wouldn’t stand much of a chance in this legal system if Clawdette were a rabbit like me. Of course with it being a carnivore verses a carnivore with a prey species at stake, it could really go either way. Me being a cop, and Cindy’s soon to be stepmother, is really the only ace we have up our sleeves in this matter that could push things in our favor. And while I hate having to resort to using *cop privilege*, I’ll do it if it means keeping Cindy away from Bernadette. But if Bernadette can actually prove that my soon to be wife, the queen of bad judgement, has been sleeping with her older daughter, even cop privilege on its own might not be enough. Not with the current public opinion towards us…

 So here I am, sucking up my pride, and agreeing to let a camera crew follow me around for a few episodes of LGBTC. The C stands for Cops… Don’t look at *me*… *I* didn’t come up with the title for the show. The whole idea of a reality show about cops from the LGBT community just seems pretty garish and exploitive to me. I wouldn’t even be doing the show if I didn’t need to be in the department’s favor right now.

 “Try not to look at the camera,” the peacock in the back seat said. I wasn’t sure exactly what his position was, but in addition to holding the microphone so people could hear what I was saying, he also seemed to be the one calling the shots. It was just the two of them, they couldn’t exactly fit a whole crew into my squad car, but the cameraman seemed to be taking directions from him. I kind of hoped we didn’t have to arrest anyone, because that would leave that peacock sitting in the back with the perp. Not really ideal… Did other cop shows do it like this, or were these guys just amateurs who hadn’t thought everything through?

 “Right… Sorry…” I said as I looked back away from the camera.

 “Just act like you normally would if we weren’t here,” the peacock said.

 I nodded and focused on my driving.

 “Oh, but don’t stay silent,” the peacock then added. “Talk to us while you drive.”

 “I thought I was supposed to act like you weren’t here?” I asked. “I wouldn’t be talking to you if you weren’t here…”

 “Talk to us without looking at us,” the peacock corrected.

 I rolled my eyes. I wish he would make up his damned mind. “So act like I’m ignoring you but not really?”

 “Sure. Go with that.”

 “Okay, so… Have you guys done this ride along thing before, or am I your first one?” I asked.

 “No, don’t talk to us personally…” the peacock quickly argued. “We’re not here, remember?”

 “What do you *want* me to talk about?” I asked, frustrated.

 “Why don’t you start by telling us about yourself? The audience wants to know who they are watching.”

 I let out a little sigh and nodded. “My name is Officer Cotton, I’m a police officer with the-”

 “Is Cotton your first name or last name?” the peacock interrupted me before I could finish.

 “Why does it matter?” I asked. “Maybe I don’t want the whole world knowing my full name… What if I bust some small time drug dealer on camera and it gets broadcast to the whole world and that guy I busted ended up being the nephew of some big time crime boss? What if he watches the show and sees me introducing myself? Do you think I want someone like that to have my full name? What if he doesn’t like the fact that I busted his nephew and wants to send someone to show me how much he doesn’t like it? He’s got my full name now so all he has to do is look me up in the phone book.”

 “But aren’t cops required to identify themselves when they approach someone? Don’t you have to give out your full name then?” the peacock asked.

 “That’s a misconception,” I informed him. “A lot of people believe that they can ask any police officer for their name or badge number, and that if they refuse to give it, it’s a violation of the law. But the fact of the matter is that depending on your jurisdiction, which could be city, college, county, or state, officers may have no obligation to wear identification at all, *let alone* disclose it on request. And departmental policies that *do* require identification often allow broad discretion for an officer to suspend the rule if they experience a threat, be it a present danger or existential, such as someone later using that information to harass. So no, I *don’t* have to give you my name. I told you my name is Officer Cotton and you should be glad I told you *that much.* I’m not going to say if it’s my first or last name… God, this is a mess… Let’s start the introduction over.”

 “No, that was actually really good! We’re keeping that,” the peacock insisted. “Monologues like that are exactly what we want. So your job is pretty dangerous then?”

 “Well of course… I’m a cop,” I nodded. “I go out every day, or night… depending on what shift I have… and sometimes everything’s fine… Sometimes I have to confront people doing things they shouldn’t be doing and they don’t like that… The fact that I’m a rabbit doesn’t do me a lot of favors when it’s the latter… Sometimes I have to confront people and they aren’t going to see me as a threat because to them I’m just food. They can literally go to the grocery store and buy me in the meat department. Well, not me *personally*… but they can buy rabbit… So it’s a dangerous job, and for me personally, it’s maybe a little *more* dangerous than it is for others…”

 “And you’re also a lesbian,” the peacock then pointed out and I narrowed my eyes a little unhappily.

 “Does that really need to be brought up?” I asked.

 “It’s kind of the whole point of the show,” the peacock nodded.

 I sighed and nodded again. “Yes… I’m a lesbian.”

 “Has that even caused you problems in your job?” the peacock asked.

 “Not on the streets,” I answered. “When people see me there is nothing to indicate that I’m a lesbian. They just see a rabbit in a uniform.”

 “What about back at the police station? Does your sexuality cause any problems for you there?”

 I laughed and shook my head. “No… We aren’t talking about that. I agreed to do this show because the department wanted some positive imagery for a change. You’re not going to lure me into talking about discrimination in the workplace. You’re going to cut this part out and we aren’t talking about it.”

 That was the last thing I needed. I wanted to stay on the chief’s *good* side. I did *not* need him up my ass because I went on national TV and told everyone that I get discriminated against back at the station because of my sexuality. Something like that would just give people one more reason to hate cops.

 “But you do get discriminated against, don’t you?” the peacock asked.

 “What the hell do *you* think?” I asked angrily. “I’m a woman and I don’t like men! *Of course* I get discriminated against! I get discriminated against every day! I get it from my co-workers! I get it from the cashier at the grocery store! I get it from random people on the sidewalk who don’t even know me! They just see me walking hand in hand with my girlfriend and they discriminate against me. So yeah… It happens… But I don’t want my superiors riding my ass so we aren’t talking about it happening at the station.”

 “That’s the sort of thing this show is supposed to help make people aware of and put a stop to,” the peacock tried to argue.

 “No…” I told him in a stern voice. “This show isn’t supposed to put a stop to anything… Its only purpose is to parade homosexuals like me around and make a spectacle of us for the people at home to gawk at, just like every other gay-centric reality show out there. It’s just cops this time because cops are topical right now. If there had been a big scandal in the dairy industry recently you’d be shooting a show about gay cows right now instead… I’ll play nice and make a spectacle of myself for you because that helps me out right now. But if you try to get me talking about something that won’t help me out, then I’m not talking to you. Do you understand? I’ll just give you the stereotypical cop show bullshit like… Yeah, this town is full of crazies… It used to be a nice little town but now I drive down these streets and nine times out of ten I have to pull over and force a Burmese python to vomit a family of five back up…”

 “We could actually use that last bit,” the peacock shrugged. “Have you actually done that?”

 “Yes…” I sighed.

 Then the scanner alerted me to a 10-16 in the area and I radioed in that we were on the on the way. Once I was done the peacock asked me what a 10-16 was and I answered, “Domestic disturbance.” Figures I would get a domestic… I didn’t really watch cop shows, real or fictional… I just wasn’t interested in coming home from work and watching more work… If I was going to relax and watch TV I’d rather have something that would make me laugh. Lord knows I needed it after a long day on the job… But it seems like every time I *did* see one of those shows where they had a camera crew riding along with an officer, they were always getting called in for domestics. I’d often wondered if that was just a coincidence or if domestic disturbances just made for better television…

 When we arrived at the apartment complex I was already hoping this domestic disturbance wasn’t about to turn into attempted predation. Not that I couldn’t deal with it if that was the case, but I always hated to see it when it happened. Ironic considering who I was getting married to… But it tended to turn out that way a little too often for comfort.

 My fears were kind of eased when I got out of the car and proceeded up the sidewalk towards the apartment that had made the call, the camera crew following behind me, and I quickly spotted what looked like whipped cream splattered all over the place. Whipped cream and possibly bits of… crust and… was that cherry? It was on the sidewalk, on the side of the apartment, in the grass… Just all over the place. It eased my fears a little bit about this being any kind of predation, attempted or otherwise, but it *did* leave me wondering just what the hell was going on…

 When knocked on the door a rather chubby tiger answered with more whipped cream smeared on her chest and face. Well not exactly her face per se, but on her chin. Just enough to be instantly noticeable without making too much of a mess in her fur.

 “How are you doing? Did you call?” I asked the woman.

 “Yes I did,” she answered.

 I nodded. “What can I do for you?”

 “Okay…” the woman said, stepping out of the house. “They’ve been coming down here yelling and screaming at us and using vulgar language.”

 “Who has?” I quickly asked before she could continue.

 “The people down there in apartment twelve,” the tiger answered as she pointed down the sidewalk.

 “Okay, what happened?” I asked.

 “They came down here banging on the door wanting to give my kids pie.”

 “They wanted to give your kids pie?” I asked, a little unsure.

 “Yeah, they came down here banging on the door wanting to give my kids pie,” she repeated. “But it’s ten o’clock at night. I don’t want my kids having sweets this late. They’re already in bed. So I told them no. I told them to leave. But they wouldn’t take that for an answer and they kept coming back and trying to give us pie and I told them no.”

 I help a hand up to stop her for a moment. “Do you know these people?” I asked.

 “Me and Crystal know each other but we got into an argument and ever since last week we’ve been fighting. We’ve been leaving each other alone not talking to each other,” the woman answered.

 “You’ve been not talking to each other or you’ve been fighting?” I asked.

 “We had a fight and then we stopped talking to each other,” the woman clarified.

 “Okay, and was this fight physical?” I asked.

 “No! No!” the woman quickly argued with an almost shocked look on her face. “We just got to yelling and screaming at each other and then we stopped talking and that was all that happened, I promise.”

 “Okay,” I nodded.

 “And they had a party down there and they were drinking and everything and then they came down here and started on us,” the woman quickly continued. “All I did was ask them to move their car and-”

 “You asked them to move their car?” I asked, furrowing my brow in confusion. “What was wrong with their car?”

 “One of their friends parked their car in our driveway and I didn’t want it in my driveway so I asked them to move it,” the woman answered.

 “You went over there and asked them to move it?” I asked. “Was this before or after they started banging on your door trying to give you pie?”

 “They came down here banging on our door trying to give us pie and I told them no, and then I saw the car in my driveway and I asked them to move it.”

 “Okay… So you told them you didn’t want pie and then you asked them to move the car while they were here,” I nodded. “How’d you get pie all over yourself?”

 “Because they got mad that I wouldn’t take the pie!” the woman shouted. “They came down here and they started slinging pie and beer and everything!”

 “They threw pie and beer at you because you wouldn’t take the pie?” I asked, a little confused. I can’t say that would be the weirdest domestic dispute I’d ever answered to, but it was certainly the weirdest one I’d heard *this* week…

 “That’s what I’m telling you!” the woman shouted.

 “Okay, calm down,” I quickly said. “Are you good friends? You and Crystal?”

 “No, I don’t talk to Crystal!” the woman argued loudly.

 “You used to though,” I said. That was what she had just told me after all…

 “No. I only talk to Lola. The woman who lives in apartment twelve. All these people, they-”

 “Hold on…” I interrupted. “Lola lives in apartment twelve?” That was *not* what she had just told me a moment ago. The story was getting more confusing by the moment. “Who’s Crystal?”

 “Crystal’s her cousin,” the woman answered.

 “Crystal is Lola’s cousin?” I asked just to be sure.

 “Yes,” the woman nodded. “They get down there and their drinking and doing all this stuff. I’m not going to name the other things they’re doing. And they’re doing all of that and I’m not going to be the one getting in trouble for that kind of stuff!”

 “Okay, ma’am, you aren’t in trouble for anything,” I assured her. “Okay? Whatever they’re down there doing, as long as you aren’t down there doing it with them, you’re not going to get in any trouble for it. So just calm down and explain to me what happened.”

 “They’re all mad because I won’t let my kids have pie,” she said, clearly trying to calm down but just as clearly having trouble doing that. “It’s ten o’clock at night. My kids are in bed. I don’t want them having sweets. We’re having a disagreement. It’s best if they just stay away and they won’t take the hint so they came down here and threw pie at me.”

 “Okay,” I nodded, deciding that was probably the least confusing answer I was going to get out of the woman. “You go back inside. I’m going to go down there and talk to them. Okay?”

 “Alright,” the woman nodded before stepping back inside her house.

 Once she had done that I walked down the sidewalk to apartment twelve. When I knocked on the door an iguana answered simply with the word, “Yeah?”

 “Is this your apartment?” I asked him.

 “No, it’s my sister’s,” he answered. “Lola’s…”

 “Good. That’s who I need to talk to. Is Lola here?” I asked. “Lola or Crystal?”

 “Crystal?” the iguana asked then looked over his shoulder into the apartment. Thank you so much for falling for that, Mr. Iguana, and indicating that Crystal was there as well.

 “Is Crystal in there? I need to talk to her too,” I said.

 “Yeah, hold on,” he said then went inside. A moment later two iguana women came out and stood side by side as they looked at me. I blinked and had to contain myself when I saw them. Suddenly the whole throwing pie thing was starting to make a bit more sense. Both women were wearing clown makeup.

 “I’m Lola. This is my apartment,” the one on the right said.

 “Okay so here’s the deal,” I said and before I could say another word the other one instantly jumped in and started shouting at me.

 “They’ve been harassing my cousin! We’ve had to make calls against them!”

 Lovely… Because yelling at me and accusing *them* of stuff is going to make the situation better… It’s not like I haven’t heard this one before at every other domestic I get called in to…

 “Okay, so why is there a trail of pie leading all the way down to their apartment?” I asked.

 “Because their kids were down there wining and looking at us and I felt really bad about it so I wanted to give them some pie too,” Crystal answered.

 “What do you mean, her kids were wining and looking at you? She says her kids were in bed,” I argued.

 “Her kids were *not* in bed! They were up and they were standing there at the door looking at us and-”

 “They were standing here in front of your door?” I asked in confusion.

 “No! They were standing down there in their door looking out at us-”

 “How could they see you?” I quickly asked. “Your apartment door isn’t facing theirs. Were you outside?”

 “We’ve been in and out! We’re having a party! Is it against the law for us to go outside in our own yard?” Lola butted in and asked angrily.

 “If it’s a loud party and there’s a lot of carrying on then this late at night, yes, that could be disturbing the peace,” I answered with a nod.

 “We weren’t being loud!” Crystal argued very loudly. “We just came outside to smoke!”

 “So you were out here eating pie while you were smoking?” I asked skeptically.

 “Look, I just felt really bad for them, okay?” Crystal argued. “I mean, if somebody were to… if it were me… I have two kids of my own, you know? And I-”

 “Okay, okay. Let’s just get back to why there’s pie all over the place,” I told her.

 “Okay well we were standing over there…” Crystal said before Lola instantly butted in with,

 “They came out yelling at us!”

 I quickly held a hand up to quiet her and pointed at Crystal to continue.

 “And I try to explain to Tilly’s mother that I just want to give her kids some pie, okay?” Crystal said. “I just want to give them some pie. That’s all I want to do. I know we’ve had our differences, but this isn’t about us. This is for the kids. And she’s like no, we don’t want your pie. And I’m like, what difference does it make who it’s from? It’s just pie. Just take the pie. And she’s like, no. And I’m getting angry because she won’t take the pie, and I’m like, just take the pie. Just take the pie. Just take the pie. It’s not hard. You don’t have to eat it. It’s for the kids. Or don’t give it to them. Take it and throw it away. Just take the pie.”

 At that point I was starting to get uncomfortable. This woman clearly had… issues… I mean, if she’s telling her to take the pie and throw it away then why even argue about it? Why is it so important that she take the pie?

 “So the only thing I could think of to do was to just throw the pie in her face,” Crystal then concluded with a little smile and a shrug.

 I blinked in surprise. Well that solved that then I guess. I had been a little skeptical about the tiger’s story just because of how the whipped cream on her face had looked. It had almost appeared too clean to be someone who had been hit in the face with a pie. It looked more like she had just taken a bit of whipped cream off of the ground and dabbed it on her chin and side of her face so I would be sure to see it and believe her, while at the same time trying not to make too much of a mess in her fur that she would have to clean later. But if Crystal here was just going to *admit* to throwing pie in her face there wasn’t much point in questioning it.

 “Okay throwing the pie is just as bad as hitting her. That’s a battery assault,” I explained.

 “Well I didn’t know th- I don’t understand that. It’s just pie,” Crystal quickly tried to argue.

 “Well it is,” I told her. “That’s battery. It’s the same as punching her in the face.”

 “Well I didn’t want to punch her. I didn’t want to push her. I didn’t want to do anything to hurt her so I just threw the pie in her face, and she tried to punch me but I just ran. I don’t want to get into a fight,” Crystal explained, speaking rapidly now.

 “Then why even hit her with the pie?” I asked, holding a hand up in an attempt to get her to stop talking. “It was a nice gesture but if she didn’t want the pie then she didn’t want the pie, okay? You can’t force people to take things they don’t want, alright?”

 “We’re too good for them anyways,” Lola said.

 “I hope she doesn’t press charges against you,” I said, trying to ignore Lola.

 “Well I hope she liked it because we spent forty dollars on those pies,” Crystal said.

 “Her husband beats her up all the time!” Lola shouted.

 “Well that’s-” I tried to say.

 “Her husband beats her up and she’s going to press charges on us because she’s a bitch!” Lola shouted.

 “It was just pie! It could have been my fist!” Crystal shouted.

 “State law’s the same thing,” I argued.

 “She’s lucky it wasn’t my fist!” Crystal declared in a cocky tone.

 “Okay, just stay inside tonight. I could hear you partying when I walked up,” I told them, starting to get really frustrated with the chaos the conversation was devolving into.

 Lola rolled her eyes at me and tossed her head back. “We only get together when it’s somebody’s birthday. It’s not like we do this all the time.”

 “It was a good pie though,” Crystal insisted, as if that made any kind of difference.

 “That’s great,” I nodded. “Now let me tell you what’s going to happen if I have to come out here again. If I have to come back out here because of you two I’m going to give you a trespass order and you’ll *never* be allowed to come back over here and visit your cousin. Do you understand?”

 “Well that’s why I didn’t hit her!” Crystal argued angrily.

 “You did hit her, okay?” I argued back. “You did hit her under state law.”

 “Well she hits everyone else too!” Lola interrupted.

 “I don’t care!” I shouted at her in frustration.

 “They beat the shit out of other people!” Crystal chimed in.

 “I don’t care! I don’t care! I’m only here for the pie issue!”

 “Her and her husband-” Lola started to say.

 “Don’t talk to me about her and her husband!” I shouted angrily.

 “They’ve eaten people in their house before!” Crystal shouted.

 “I’m not here for that! I’m here for this and you’re telling me about something else!” I shouted.

 “Well, they’re lucky,” Lola huffed unhappily.

 “No, *you’re* lucky. Because you could be going to jail right now,” I informed her unhappily. I wasn’t just unhappy that they were arguing with me. I was unhappy that I had allowed myself to get so frustrated with them that I’d started shouting back. Had I really just told them I didn’t care? I don’t care that they assault people? I don’t care that they eat people? Look at me… I was feeding right into the cop stereotype, using the law to defend a carnivore and threatening to arrest a prey species over something so minor and ridiculous I wasn’t even surprised they were both in clown makeup. And worse of all I was doing it right in front of a camera crew.

 Yeah… This video wasn’t going to do anything to endear the public towards the police force under the current situation. Even if I *was* a prey species myself… Cop says she doesn’t care about reports of domestic violence and illegal predation. Arrests clowns for doing clown stuff… I shouldn’t have lost my cool and said that. All because these two wouldn’t just hear me out… Because they just *had* to be right in their minds…

 “Just go inside, keep it down, and enjoy your party,” I told them then turned around and started walking away before they had time to draw me into anything else I would regret. I went back and talked to the tiger one more time to make sure she didn’t want to press charges. I really hoped she wouldn’t, but under state law what had happened *had* counted at battery so I had to ask if she wanted to.

 It was so stupid. It was just pie. She got a bit of whipped cream on her fur. It would wash out. She hadn’t actually been harmed in any way. But the state law was the state law and I couldn’t do anything about it. Thankfully the tiger decided *not* to press charges. That was one small relief.

 But I had still lost it and said the things I said in front of a camera because those two idiots back there couldn’t accept the fact that someone didn’t want pie. The whole night was turning into a total disaster. And the scariest part of all was that I was starting to understand Clawdette a little bit better. This had to be how she felt when she talked about losing her cool with one of her patrons at the library and eating them. Not that this was the first time I’d ever been in a situation like that, or the first time I’d ever lost my cool… But thinking about how that was going to look when it aired on TV all I could think was if I could have just eaten those two when they started getting unruly it sure as hell would have made the whole situation a lot less complicated.

 Okay, that’s not true. It would have made everything so much worse. But as mad as I was, it would have at least *felt* a hell of a lot better.

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 I was in my locker room back at the station getting changed out of my uniform. When I say I was in *my* locker room and not in *the* locker room, it’s because I wasn’t actually allowed to use the women’s locker room. State ordinances didn’t allow for police officers to wear their uniforms while off duty. We could take them home and wash them, keep them in our closet, do anything we wanted with them… But we couldn’t wear them when we were off duty. It was just a weird state ordinance… So the station had locker rooms for us to change in and out of our uniforms in.

 But because I was a lesbian there had been complaints about me using the women’s locker room. Some of the other female officers didn’t want me in there because they were uncomfortable getting undressed in front of me. They said since I was into other women, it would be no different than getting undressed in front of a guy.

 As annoying as that was, I had stayed reasonable about it. I could at least understand that. I *did* like women. So I could understand them thinking that it would be too tempting for me to be in there leering at all the other women. And I could get the other women not wanting me leering at them… The part I didn’t keep quiet and just go along with was when it was suggested that I use the *men’s* locker room instead.

 Okay, so the reasoning was that I wouldn’t be leering at anyone in there because I wasn’t interested in men, but that didn’t change the fact that all the men would instead be leering at *me!* You think I want a bunch of guys gawking at *me* while *I’m* undressing? How is that any different than the women not wanting me doing it to *them?* The fact that I actually had to *explain* that was kind of an outrage. And yes, I was actually asked, *why do you care if the men look at you? You don’t even care about men…* That’s not how it fucking works!

 Is that honestly what people think about lesbians? That we’re just perfectly fine prancing around naked in front of a bunch of men because we don’t care about them? Do people think we have absolutely no shame or don’t feel embarrassment and just let anyone who wants see us naked? That kind of mindset was just staggering. Everyone’s worried about the poor straight people being put into a situation where a homosexual could see them undressing but no one cares about a homosexual being put in the same situation? What the fuck?

 So instead of using either of the locker rooms, I was given a locker in an old janitorial closet and that had been converted into my locker room. Or I guess I shouldn’t say it was *my* locker room *personally*. There was one other person who used it as well.

 I heard the sound of the door opening behind me followed by the sound of Pip’s voice. “I heard about your night with the clowns.”

 I looked over my shoulder to frown at Pip. He was a rabbit just like me. Solid white fur and white, chin length hair cut in an attractive, but very obviously women’s fashion. Pip was gay so he and I both used what had become known around the station as the *queer’s locker room.* We were the only two who used it. Neither one of us had anything the other was interested in so it was decided it would be fine.

 Although that wasn’t *entirely* true. Maybe neither one of us was sexually attracted to the other, but to say neither of us had anything the other was interested in was a bit misleading. I was actually *kind* of interested in Pip’s body, just not in a sexual way. I was *jealous* of it…

 There were days when I was convinced that Pip had a more feminine body than *I* did. He was a slender, shapely little guy. Shapely in the way you would expect a woman to be, not a man… There were more than a few times I’d caught myself peeking over at him wondering how the hell he had such a perfect hourglass figure. His waist was narrower than mine and his hips possibly wider than mine. A man just shouldn’t look like that. And don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying a man can’t look like that if he wants to. I’m saying *biologically*, that’s just not something you see…

 He had such a perfectly beautiful feminine figure that when I first saw him I thought for sure he had to be wearing shapewear under his uniform. And then we started using the same locker room and I saw him undress and no… That was all natural. Even his face was incredibly feminine. I’d started wondering if maybe he was taking female hormones but he hadn't ever shown any signs of developing breasts so I wasn’t sure if that was the case either and I was too embarrassed to ask. Pip just had a better body than me plain and simple and I was jealous of him. Hell… I might even be willing to put up with having a dick if *I* could look like that.

 “I brought you something to help cheer you up after that,” he said with a smile as he held out a short, square box and lifted the lid to reveal a pie inside.

 I narrowed my eyes at him, feeling quite unamused. “Hilarious…” I grumbled then turned back around as I continued undressing. “Does the whole station know?”

 “Well, no one’s seen the tape yet, but the camera crew was talking about the incident with the clowns tonight and word’s been traveling fast. Give it until your next shift and everyone will know.”

 I rolled my eyes. “Nothing happened. It was no big deal.”

 “You got called in to a domestic because a couple of clowns threw a pie in a woman’s face. That’s pretty funny,” Pip argued. “And the way I hear the story, they got you so riled up you were screaming at them and threatening to arrest them. How many clowns do you think you can pack into the back of your cruiser? Eight? Nine?”

 I sighed and looked back over at him. He’d set the pie down on the single bench between his locker and my own and was already undressing. He was already out of his pants and I could see that he was wearing women’s panties that just barely contained the bulge in his crotch and instead of socks he was wearing thigh high black stockings.

 Whatever I was about to say was already forgotten as I instead asked, “They let you wear that under your uniform?”

 “Why not? Your panties aren’t that different than mine,” he pointed out.

 Mine had a little more than just thin straps around my hips, but he had a point. If I could wear women’s underwear I don’t see why he couldn’t. It wasn’t like there was an underwear inspector making us drop our pants at the door to ensure our underwear was practical enough or anything. “I mostly meant your stockings…”

 Pip raised a leg and placed one foot on the bench between us. “Women are allowed to wear hose if they want. We don’t have to wear socks.”

 “So you’re counting yourself as a woman now?” I asked with a little smirk.

 “I’m definitely not one of the guys,” Pip winked.

 I shrugged as I grabbed my casual clothes out of my locker and started pulling them on. “So they have a camera crew with you tonight as well?” I asked.

 “Of course,” Pip nodded. “We’re the only gay cops here. You think they weren’t going to stick *me* on TV?”

 “No… I’d have been shocked if they didn’t,” I answered only to have Pip narrow his eyes at me.

 “And what’s *that* supposed to mean?”

 “You’re more visually gay than I am,” I told him bluntly. “I’m pretty sure you’ll be the focus of whatever episodes they stick us in.”

 “*More visually gay…?* Cotton, you can call me a twink. It’s fine. I’m owning it. But I don’t know about me being the focus… I didn’t arrest any clowns,” Pip shrugged.

 I ignored that comment. “Those assholes kept complaining that I wasn’t gay enough. Every time we finished shooting an incident they kept telling me, *that was good, but can you do it gayer next time?*”

 “Seriously?” Pip asked, raising a brow in disbelief. “Yeah, I didn’t have that problem.”

 “Because you’re our prissy little twink,” I smirked at him. “There’s no question what team *you’re* batting for.”

 “Isn’t it pitching for the other team?” Pip asked, giving me a puzzled look.

 “I thought it was batting for the other team…” I said as I furrowed my brow. “I don’t know… Don’t expect me to keep up with every term the straights use to describe us…”

 “Well I’m more of a catcher than a pitcher anyways,” Pip shrugged.

 “Don’t expect me to know what that means either,” I said, rolling my eyes.

 “Oh, you *know* what it means,” Pip grinned.

 Before I could say anything else the door to our little locker room swung open again and we both looked over surprised. Like I said, Pip and I were the only ones who used that room so there shouldn’t have been anyone else coming in. And then my eyes widened when I saw one of the cameramen walking right in like he owned the place, camcorder and all, and that peacock who had been in the car with me right behind him. Pip yelped and tried to cover himself with his hands when he saw them and I quickly jumped over the bench, standing in front of Pip with my arms held out wide to try and block their view.

 “Hey! What the fuck do you think you’re doing?!” I shouted at them angrily.

 “We want to get some footage of the queer locker room,” the peacock said as if there was no problem at all with what he was doing. “Maybe some footage of the two of you interacting after you shift… If will look great on the series trailer.”

 “Get the fuck out! He’s naked in here!” I screamed as I continued trying to shield Pip.

 “So are you two fine undressing together?” the peacock asked. “Is officer Pip just like one of the girls to you?”

 And that’s when I punched him in the face.

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 Punching Javier in the face hadn’t been the best decision. That was the peacock’s name apparently. Javier… Although he didn’t have any kind of accent to make having such a name sound any less pretentious. Had punching him in the face been justified? Absolutely… But it hadn’t made my superiors very happy that I had assaulted a film crew inside the station. That was the kind of image we were trying to avoid.

 Normally I would agree that having police officers assaulting film crews were not a thing that should be happening. It *was* sadly happening. All too often in recent months… And it shouldn’t be. But if there was ever a time when an officer needed to assault a film crew, I would have to say that was it. Still, it hadn’t done me any favors. And my punishment for that was that now I wasn’t *just* letting the film crew follow me around on the job… Today they were coming home with me and getting footage of my home life.

 Naturally I could have said no. I didn’t *have* to let them film me and my family at home. But I still needed to be in the department’s good favor. That little punch had set me back a good bit.

 “This is my house,” I told the camera crew without actually looking at them as I led them through the front door. “I used to live in an apartment up town but I just moved in here with my fiancée recently.” I then gestured over to Clawdette who was standing in the living room awkwardly, waiting for us. “And this is my fiancée, Clawdette.”

 “Can you show her some PDA for the camera?” Javier asked in a loud whisper.

 I rolled my eyes.

 “Huh?” Clawdette asked.

 “They want to emphasize that we’re homosexuals,” I grumbled. “Women kissing makes great TV I guess…”

 “Oh, well if that’s all,” Clawdette shrugged then wrapped her arms around me and shoved her muzzle into my own in a kiss. It was perhaps a little more passionate than what was needed, but I don’t guess I can complain about kissing my fiancée.

 “So you’re a predator and prey couple,” Javier then asked abruptly. “Does that ever bother you given the kind of things you have to deal with on the job?”

 I gritted my teeth and forced myself to stay friendly. But seriously… What kind of question was that to ask? Especially right out of the gate like that…

 “No, it doesn’t bother me,” I answered. “I love Clawdette and I trust her completely.”

 “Clawdette, you seem to have a surprised look on your face, hearing her say that,” Javier quickly said as the camera focused on her.

 God damn it, Clawdette…

 “Oh, well… Honestly I don’t think she trusts me *that* much,” Clawdette admitted.

 Don’t do this, Clawdette…

 “What makes you think that?” Javier asked.

 “And this is my daughter, Cindy!” I quickly said, trying to get their attention off of Clawdette and gesturing to Cindy as she came walking into the room and looked up at us curiously.

 “Hi…”Cindy said.

 “Now is Cindy your biological daughter?” Javier asked as they focused over on her.

 “My real mom is dead,” Cindy answered before I could say anything.

 “Yeah, Cindy actually lost her only parent in a shooting,” I nodded. “Clawdette’s actually the one who adopted her. But now that I’m marrying her, Cindy’s going to be my daughter too…” I then paused for a moment and looked directly over at Javier. “Is this really how you want this? It feels more like an interview as opposed to what we were doing the other night…”

 “It’s fine. We’ll cut most of this,” Javier nodded. “Probably just use it for clips to splice in.”

 I wasn’t sure what he meant by that, but okay…

 “Are you going to make fun of my moms for being lesbians?” Cindy then asked completely out of nowhere.

 “No, this show isn’t going to be making fun of anyone,” Javier assured her. “How do you feel about your mom’s being lesbians? Does that bother you?”

 “No,” Cindy answered, shaking her head.

 I on the other hand was a little taken aback that he had asked her such a question. “Is that sort of thing really necessary to ask her?”

 “Relax, the viewers love seeing kids talk about having same sex parents,” Javier told me quickly before turning his attention back on Cindy. “You don’t ever feel left out that you don’t have a dad?”

 My jaw dropped and I could already hear Clawdette starting to growl behind me. But again, before I could say anything, Cindy answered him.

 “No… I’m not interested in dick,” she said with a shrug.

 Javier looked both stunned and confused by that answer and he exchanged a glance with the cameraman before looking back over at me questioningly. “Why would she…?”

 “I’m asexual,” Cindy said with a shrug then turned and walked away.

 “I… don’t think she understood what you were asking her,” I said with a nervous laugh. “Cindy’s never had a father before so the concept of missing out on anything just doesn’t occur to her. I’m not sure what she *thought* you were asking but… uhh…”

 “Look… Everyone knows rabbits practice incest,” Javier said, giving me an unamused look. “That’s just how rabbits are. If you put two rabbits together, they’re going to do it. Doesn’t matter if they are related or even *how* they are related… It’s just natural to you guys… So if that sort of thing is going on in this house there’s no reason for you to be embarrassed about it.”

 I couldn’t believe he’d just said that to me. He was technically correct in his assertion about rabbits. We were like that… And yeah… everyone pretty much knew that… But it still wasn’t something we openly flaunted in front of everyone. And someone my age certainly didn’t do that kind of thing with someone Cindy’s age! So regardless of how wrong or right he was, I didn’t like the implications of what he was saying. And I apparently wasn’t the only one.

 Before I even realized she had moved, Clawdette was no longer behind me. She was behind Javier now, placing her hands down on his shoulders as she leaned in over him. I believe she was having to push down on his shoulders to do that because a peacock and a fennec fox weren’t all that different in height.

 “I don’t like you asking my daughter the kind of questions you’ve been asking her,” Clawdette growled unhappily. “She’s a perfectly happy and well-adjusted young girl and I don’t appreciate you trying to make her question that or her home life…”

 I don’t know if well-adjusted is the term I’d use to describe Cindy but I wasn’t going to admit to that.

 “Instead of focusing on that, let’s focus on something else…” my very not well-adjusted fiancée continued. “This is supposed to be a cop show, right? Have you had to witness any acts of predation yet? Has Cotton explained to you yet the laws regarding predation? Like how it would be completely illegal for me to eat you right now…? But if I were to, say… swallow you whole… there wouldn’t be any evidence of me partaking in illegally obtained meat product… And even if someone did call the cops on me, if you already stopped squirming in my gut by the time they showed up, there wouldn’t be anything they could do about it… Interesting how that law works. You only have rights as a person while you’re alive. Once you’re dead you’re just food. And if there’s no way to prove that food wasn’t obtained legally, no cop is going to make me vomit you back up to find out. So I get off the hook for it with little more than a dirty look.”

 “Yeah, she’s actually correct about that,” I nodded. “With actual meat product as valuable as it is, no cop is going to make a predator with a full belly vomit it back up to find out if it was illegal prey or processed and properly sold meat. We *used* to do that, a long time ago… But then there were all the lawsuits against the police department… Carnivores get angry when they actually take the trouble of going through all the proper channels to obtain legal meat and then some cop comes along and makes them vomit it back up anyways… It’s not like they’re going to eat it a second time… Who wants to eat vomit? So the Law of Nature Bill was passed and it became illegal for a cop to force a predator to regurgitate its prey unless there was direct evidence that the prey was still alive in the predator’s stomach.”

 “You, uhh… Can’t eat me though…” Javier said with a nervous little laugh. “Everyone here would know… Your fiancée’s a cop… She can’t let you do that…”

 I smirked at the peacock. “Actually, I’m off duty right now, so I can’t legally detain her and force her to regurgitate. I’d have to call the police and hope the responding officers got here in time to do it before you were dead,” I told him with a shrug.

 “I haven’t had peacock in several months,” Clawdette said as she slowly licked the side of Javier’s face.

 Javier tried to pull away from her but Clawdette gripped down tight and held him in place. “This is all on camera! You wouldn’t be able to get away with it!” he shouted in almost a panic.

 It was time for me to make a decision. Scaring the little prick was fun, and he totally deserved it, but was I really willing to take things farther than that? Clawdette had that look in her eyes. I knew that look. If I didn’t step in and stop her now I had very little doubt that she actually *would* eat Javier. That was a fox who had just marked a peacock as her prey. It really didn’t take much for Clawdette. She’d mark someone as her prey just for giving her a little too much trouble at work… And this guy was trying to screw with her *daughter*. He’d gone a step too far.

 Now I *could* just turn a blind eye and let Clawdette eat him. After the various thigs he’d said to me, the way he showed zero respect for poor Pip’s privacy, what he had just tried to do with Cindy… I wasn’t going to be very broken up about it if he got eaten. My fiancée had to eat after all, and we didn’t exactly make enough on a cop’s salary and the hourly wage of a librarian to afford properly processed, legally obtained meat for every meal… So it wouldn’t be the first time I’d let the Law of Nature go into effect so Clawdette could stay fed.

 But on the other hand, legality or not, my superiors weren’t going to be very happy if the camera crew that came to my house got eaten. As much as I hated to admit to it, I knew that I could let Clawdette eat Javier *and* the cameraman and I could film the whole thing while she did it, then turn the tape over to the chief himself and we *still* wouldn’t be in trouble. Cops would look out for other cops. But I still needed to stay in good favor and while there wouldn’t be legal repercussions, favor would not be a thing I would have a lot of.

 I had to remind myself this was for Cindy. The whole reason I was doing this was to keep her safe. So no… I’m sorry, Clawdette, but you can’t have Javier for dinner.

 And then Blythe walked down the stairs and through the room, not even noticing us in one of her *I just woke up and I’m not aware of anything until I get coffee* dazes after sleeping in way later than anyone else. She was wearing a t-shirt and nothing else. Her cute little ass on full display with a fresh bite mark on it that I couldn’t be sure had come from Clawdette or Veronica. I grinned devilishly at the opportunity.

 “By the way, have I mentioned our relationship is polyamorous?” I asked, looking over at the cameraman as I pointed towards Blythe. “That’s my other girlfriend over there. Let’s follow her into the kitchen and I’ll introduce her. Come on… Half naked polyamorous lesbians will boost your ratings, right?”

 The cameraman glanced over at Javier, still trapped in Clawdette’s grip as she licked his feathers, then over at Blythe’s naked ass disappearing into the kitchen and gave me a little nod as he started following me. I waited until I was in the archway leading into the kitchen before stopping and glancing back over my shoulder at the shocked and terrified looking Javier.

 “Clawdette,” I said and she froze in place, her eyes darting over at me while her open mouth loomed directly over Javier’s head. “You can’t eat him… Remember why we’re doing this…”

 She looked disappointed. I’m sure she thought I was going to actually let her do it. And if we didn’t need him I probably would have… But I just wanted to let Javier sweat for a moment so he would think twice before trying something like he had again.

 Hmm… Do birds sweat? Well, I’m sure Javier does now…

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 “Cotton, can you grab me a bag of frozen peas?” Cherry asked.

 We were in the kitchen while Cherry prepared lunch. The cameraman and an understandably more nervous Javier were in there with us, filming while we got ready for lunch. Some casual B-roll to show the normalcy of our lives… Cherry was fashionably underdressed for the camera and clearly loving every minute of it. I know that was the sort of thing they had *hoped* to see in our home life… A bunch of women prancing around the house in next to nothing… What a disappointment for them when they found out Cherry was the straight one. I guess a straight exhibitionist just wasn’t as interesting to them as a lesbian exhibitionist would have been. Blythe was in there as well, fully dressed now and looking quite grumpy about being caught with her pants off. She hadn’t appreciated me dragging the cameraman in there in introduce her before she was awake enough to realize she was still half naked and had threatened to eat both of them if they didn’t let her watch them erase that footage.

 “Yeah, I got it,” I told Cherry as I walked over to the fridge and opened the freezer door. Although as I looked inside, I didn’t see any bags of frozen peas. “Are you sure we have any?” I asked.

 “I know we bought a couple bags the last time we went out shopping and *I* haven’t used them yet,” Cherry answered. “Did you use them?”

 “No,” I told her.

 “Oh, maybe they got stuck in the freezer down in the basement…” Blythe commented.

 “We have a freezer down in the basement?” I asked, a little surprised.

 “Yeah. It’s one of those big, freezer chest things,” Blythe nodded. “It’s in the space under the stairs.”

 “Ah,” I nodded then headed across the kitchen to the door leading down into the basement. As I started down the stairs I noticed that the cameraman was following me down with Javier right behind him so I started talking again as I descended the old wooden staircase. “I haven’t lived here with Clawdette full time for very long so I’m still learning the placement of everything. I’m not used to living in such a big house. I think this place was left to Clawdette by a family member or something. She used to have a lot of family living in this area so this is like, an old family home. I’m more used to apartment living myself…”

 Talking to the camera crew about random stuff as I was doing it was getting a lot easier the more I did it. It was almost coming naturally at this point. Like I was a seasoned pro at reality TV or something. I was actually pretty annoyed by that…

 When I got to the bottom of the stairs and walked around to the space under them I found the chest freezer just where Blythe said it would be. It was a big, white, double long freezer with a lid that opened up on the top. Kind of impossible to miss now that I knew it was there… But I hadn’t spent much time in the basement other than carrying down a few boxes and I hadn’t been looking for it then.

 As I opened the lid and looked inside, sure enough there were bags of peas in there. Those weren’t the only thing in there however…

 “Oh my god…” Javier gasped as he and the cameraman both took a step back.

 Oh my god indeed… Had Blythe been aware of what else was in that freezer? Because if she had been, she might have thought to tell me that Clawdette was keeping fucking frozen *bodies* in the basement! At least *before* I took a camera crew down there…

 But yeah… There were bodies in the freezer wrapped in plastic. The plastic was clear so even with the frost on it, it was still clear to see what was in there. Although they weren’t all entirely whole… Someone had definitely been eating off of them… But there was at least three… maybe four in there…

 I quickly spun back around to look at Javier and the cameraman in wide eyed shock. They were giving me about the same look. This wasn’t good… Storing illegally procured meat… illegally killed prey… was not a good look. And with how nervous those two were after Clawdette’s little scare earlier there was no doubt in my mind that they were going to report this. They even had video evidence to back it up.

 Again, as sick as it was, I doubted Clawdette or myself would get into too much trouble over this. There was clear evidence that the bodies were being eaten, so it would go down as illegal predation instead of flat out murder… And as a cop, no one was going to press for maximum charges against me or my soon to be wife over illegal predation. The bodies would be confiscated, we’d be fined, I might even get suspended for a little while… but I was pretty sure we wouldn’t be arrested or anything. And as much as I hated the very idea of cop privilege, in the situation we were in I wasn’t so self-righteous that I wouldn’t take advantage of it this time.

 The *real* problem was that this might come up in court when we had to go up against Bernadette for custody of Cindy. If the department couldn’t keep these two or the network they were working for quiet about this it was *sure* to come up in court. And that wasn’t going to look good for us. I’m pretty sure if the judge heard that we were raising Cindy in a home with a bunch of dead bodies frozen in the basement he would rule in Bernadette’s favor…

 “Okay, look…” I tried to say but Javier and his cameraman weren’t listening to me. They had already turned and started running back up the stairs. Shit… They were panicking and getting out of here.

 “Clawdette!” I shouted at the top of my lungs as I quickly chased the two back up the stairs. They blew through the door and were already across the kitchen and into the living room by the time I got out of the basement. “Clawdette, stop them!” I screamed. “They saw in your freezer!”

 To my surprise it was Cherry who gasped then quickly grabbed a kitchen knife and rushed out of kitchen after the two. That hadn’t been what I had expected… but okay, that was something…

 As I sprinted through the kitchen into the living room I arrived just in time to see Clawdette lunging through the air and tackling Javier to the living room floor. That took care of him, but I was still worried about the cameraman. He was a hog of some kind, much bigger than the rest of us, and apparently faster. He’d already made it through the foyer to the front door and was struggling to get it open with the heavy video camera still in his hands.

 And then my eyes widened in shock as Cherry rushed up behind him and without any hesitation, was about to stab him in the back. Before she could however the front door suddenly opened and both Cherry and the hog froze at the sight of the maned wolf standing on the other side. Dorothy stood there looking down at the surprised hog, Veronica right behind, peaking around her curiously. They’d been out having great grandmother and great granddaughter bonding time, whatever that implied, but had said they would be back in time for lunch.

 Dorothy then looked up, peering through the short foyer at the rest of us with a confused expression on her face.

 “Don’t let him get out! We’ll lose Cindy!” was all I could think to shout.

 “Oh… Well then…” Dorothy said before opening her mouth wide and lunging downward as she shoved it over the startled hog. He barely remembered to scream before he head was completely engulfed inside the old maned wolf’s mouth. Dorothy reached down and grabbed him by both arms as he dropped his camera then started closing her jaws around him, looking as if she was about to bite him in half at the chest.

 Thankfully before she could, Cherry shouted, “Miss Smalls, wait! I just mopped that floor…”

 Dorothy narrowed her eyes unhappily at Cherry for a moment, then rolled them and proceeded to shove the hog deeper into her maw as she started swallowing around him instead. I was honestly thankful for that. Watching someone getting eaten right in front of me, and not doing anything to stop it, was hard enough for me already. I really didn’t want to see Dorothy bite the guy in half.

 Although I couldn’t seem to pull my eyes away from the sight as Dorothy started swallowing him whole. I just stood there watching in awe as she shoved the guy ever deeper into her mouth, swallowing around him to get him down… Watched the sight of the bulge he was making in her throat… and the eventual bulge he made in the stomach once she’d gulped him all the way down. With as skinny as Dorothy was, that hog was making quite a noticeable bulge at that. I was kind of shocked she could actually fit that much in her stomach. And I could see the outline of his body perfectly with her tight skin stretched around it.

 I couldn’t pull my eyes away until I finally noticed Javier’s screaming. As I glanced back over at Clawdette, she already had the peacock half way down her throat and what was still visible of him was vanishing between her lips pretty fast. She’s apparently decided to swallow him feet first so his head and one of his arms were still sticking out of her mouth. “No! No, wait!” he screamed as he thrashed his arm around wildly, trying to grab at the carpet to pull himself back out but not being able to get a good enough grip on it. I made a mental note to talk to Clawdette about replacing what we currently had down with shag carpeting… Just on the off chance I ever found *myself* in that position…

 Clawdette kept swallowing around him though, pulling his body deeper and deeper down her gullet. Finally his head sank down into her throat and she closed her lips around the arm still sticking out. Although it was more like just a *hand* sticking out at that point… Then she made a little slurping noise as she sucked that in and gave one last swallow and after that the peacock was just a bulge in her stomach the same way the hog was in her grandmother’s.

 “Damn…” Blythe said and I only *then* realized she was standing right beside me. “I kind of wish there’d been a third one for me…”

 I gave her a funny look for a moment before my eyes drifted up past her across the living room and I noticed that standing there on the bottom step of the staircase was Cindy, watching the whole thing with wide eyes. “Crap…” grumbled as I pushed my way past Blythe and rushed over to Cindy, kneeling down in front of her as I placed my hands on her shoulders.

 “Hey Cindy… So what just happened…” I started to say, not entirely sure how I was supposed to explain all of that to her.

 “That was awesome…” Cindy replied in a hushed, awestruck voice.

 “Okay… Sure, let’s go with that…” I nodded. I know she had an interest in predation so I guess it shouldn’t have been *that* surprising, but it still wasn’t *quite* the reaction I was expecting. “But what just happened… There was a good reason for it. I want you to understand that,” I told her.

 She furrowed her brow as she looked up at me. I wasn’t quite sure what to make of the look she was giving me.

 “You understand that I still don’t approve of that sort of thing, right?” I asked her. “And normally I would have made your mom and your great grandmother stop… But well… Those guys would have helped your grandmother do something bad that we don’t want her to do… So we kind of *had* to do that this time.”

 “Oh… They were going to help Grandma take me away from you?” Cindy asked and I blinked in surprise.

 “What…? Cindy how do you know about… Clawdette did you…?” I asked, looking back over my shoulder at Clawdette.

 Clawdette was staring over at us with a startled look on her face as she slowly shook her head. “I didn’t tell her…”

 “Nor I,” Dorothy replied.

 “And it wasn’t me,” Veronica quickly added.

 “What…?” Blythe asked as all eyes in the room fell on her. “Hey, don’t look at *me!* I may not have much tact but I’m not *stupid!*”

 “Cindy, who told you your grandmother was trying to take you away from us?” I asked, looking back at her.

 “Grandma told me,” Cindy shrugged. “She wants to take me away from you and raise me herself.”

 “She told you that that one time back at the park?” I asked.

 Cindy shook her head. “No. It was after that.”

 “What?!” I gasped. “What do you mean, after that? When have you seen her since the park?”

 “Grandma comes by sometimes to talk to me,” Cindy said as if it was just a casual thing. “She comes to the window because she knows you won’t let her in the house. It’s fine though. She’s nice… She just talks to me about stuff. I don’t think I want to go live with her though.”

 “Well… That’s troubling…” Dorothy said.

 The old wolf took the words right out of my mouth.

 Cindy then ran past me over to Clawdette and quickly pressed her hands up against Clawdette’s swollen belly. “Woah, I can feel him moving in there… Are you going to digest him? Can I watch?”

 “*Okay*, Cindy! Let’s go into the kitchen and see what Cherry’s making for the *rest* of us to have for lunch,” Veronica said loudly as she quickly took her little sister by the hand and pulled her along into the kitchen.

 “Oh gosh! I hope it’s not boiling over!” Cherry shouted as she quickly ran that way as well.

 I exchanged another worried glance with Clawdette. The fact that Bernadette had been coming by and talking to Cindy without any of us knowing wasn’t great. I had no idea what that woman was up to, but I was genuinely worried.